

My name is Juliet Edwards and I am currently studying Worlds of English.

On the course that I'm doing, we are supplied with most of the material: 95 per cent, I would say. But it's all provided for me, in one block. There is some supporting video material and recorded interviews. Some of that is to do with the fact that it's a language-based course and therefore it's important to actually hear how things are said.

When it comes down to actually planning the nitty-gritty - getting down to doing the real hard reading - I always plan to do around about two hours a day, reading and note taking. Inevitably, something will get in the way of that - all sorts of things - but that is my aim. If I can't make those two hours a day, I do have to - end up having to catch it up at another time, and I just have to fit it in as and when I can.

I've got two main places where I do my reading. I like to do my skim-reading in the afternoons on my sofa at home, and do it in a sort of comfortable way. When I'm going back and doing more thorough reading, to answer a specific question or study something in more depth, I always do it in my dining room, at a table, with a pad so I can make the notes.

The reason I read in the afternoon, to start with, is really because that's just where it fits into my day logically. I've done all my chores. I've been out for a walk. I've done the washing, cooked the dinner and now I've got some time to sit down and do a bit of reading. When I'm studying harder, that could take place at any time of day; I tend to allow bigger blocks of time in my day to get on with that type of work.

When I'm selecting which parts of the text to use, again, you always need to bear in mind that it's relevant to the question. But it's very nice to be able to find a connection with the other bits of text that you used as well, so you can make sure everything hangs together and you can easily relate it to the academic theories involved.

Very often, I find that there are certain, quite big blocks in the material that actually - although they're very interesting to read - they don't really warrant going over in a great depth again, because they don't really fit with an assignment that I'm doing.

When you're trying to whittle down which bits of text are going to be totally relevant to what you're writing - or I'm writing - always reading through the summaries, the conclusions and the introductions of each section actually gives you a good overview, and you can pick out the bits that are going to fit in well.

And also using the contents: these quite detailed chapter headings. They give you a good indication of what's going to be there as well.

The thing that I like about reading academic texts is that it's something that's been researched, thought about, written up and considered, and come to a proper conclusion. Unlike, say, reading a newspaper, where you're just really reading somebody's opinion. So, it's actually, you know, justified and proven in a way. I don't always necessarily think it's particularly right, or the only way to see it, but it does... Proof is offered.

The worst bit about academic texts is that sometimes they can be a little bit dull. I have had an experience where one particular text was so boring that I actually couldn't open the book without falling asleep. And the whole thing had to be read. In the end, I resorted to buying the audio book and actually listening to it while I was standing up and doing the ironing. Fortunately, that did work as a tactic because after that, I was able to refer back to the text properly - the written text properly - when I needed to.

Actually learning the jargon and the vocabulary - the specialist vocabulary - only, for me, gets properly embedded when I use it in assignments and in essays. That's the way the true meaning firmly lodges itself in my head.

If I do find something is particularly difficult to read, or I've no idea really where it's going, I tend to just leave it. But, I think they must stay in my head somewhere, because there's many a time that when I've finished a complete chapter, or finished a complete module, I suddenly remember, "Ah, that was why I didn't understand it: because I hadn't read this part of the book," and I will go back and have another look at it, and usually it comes to me then. I get it.

The best way to make sure that you get the most out of an academic text and reading time, is to make sure that you can give it proper attention, and not to be distracted. For me, that means doing it when there's nobody else in the house. I'm lucky that I do have that opportunity quite regularly, but that's what works for me best: when I've got no distractions and I'm on my own.

I would definitely recommend anybody that was either seriously interested in this subject, or felt that they needed to learn something to have to improve their job prospects or whatever, but didn't have the time to or the facility to attend another sort of education, to consider distance learning.

To a degree, you can do it at your own pace. Although there will be some constraints on that, you can at least choose when you do it. It does take dedication. It's not easy. But if you really want to do it, you should.